

Harvest & the Growth of the Kingdom

Matthew 13 v 31-35

Context:

Biblical scholars and commentators generally agree that the dominant theme of Jesus' life and teaching is the *Kingdom*. In their gospel accounts Mark, Luke and John refer to the Kingdom of *God*, but Matthew, being a Jew and therefore wary of taking the name of God on his lips in vain and thereby breaking the third commandment, prefers to speak of the Kingdom of *Heaven*. So, two different ways of referring to the same thing. In Matthew 13 Jesus tells a series of parables to illustrate what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. At this harvest time here at St James it is interesting to note that a number of these parables use images of farming and food taken from the everyday life of people living in 1st century Israel/Palestine. In today's study we will explore just two of the stories Jesus told to the crowds that flocked around him as he sat on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Observation:

1. To what does Jesus compare the Kingdom of Heaven in v 31?
2. What happens in the story in v 32?
3. What illustration does Jesus use to describe the Kingdom in the second parable in the first half of v 33?
4. What happens in the story in the second half of that verse?
5. What interesting fact does Matthew tell us in v 34?
6. What did this fulfil according to v 35?

Meaning:

1. As we read in the Context section above, the Kingdom of Heaven/God is the dominant theme of Jesus' life and teaching. But what *is* the Kingdom? What did *Jesus* mean by it and how would his *hearers* have understood it? Share your own ideas with each other before looking for various clues in the following biblical texts [**Don't feel you must look at them all!**]: Exodus 19 v 1-6/Revelation 1 v 4-6, 1 Chronicles 29 v 10-13, Psalm 145 v 9-20, Isaiah 9 v 6-7, Daniel 7 v 9-18, Matthew 3 v 1-2, Matthew 4 v 12-17, Matthew 5 v 3-12, Matthew 6 v 9-10, Matthew 6 v 33, Mark 10 v 13-16, Luke 10 v 1-12, Matthew 24 v 14, Matthew 25 v 31-46, John 3 v 3-5, John 18 v 36, Romans 14 v 17, 1 Corinthians 4 v 20, 1 Corinthians 6 v 9-11, 2 Timothy 4 v 1-5, Hebrews 12 v 28, James 2 v 5, 2 Peter 1 v 10-11, Revelation 11 v 15-18.
2. What do the two parables teach us about the Kingdom?
3. How do we see this dynamic at work in our own lives, in our church, in our world?
4. Matthew tells us in v 34 that Jesus limited himself to the telling of parables when he was teaching the crowds. Why do you think he did this? – see v 35 and v 10-17.
5. What can we learn from Jesus' teaching method to help us in our preaching, teaching and evangelism today?

Application:

1. In what ways do these two parables both challenge and encourage us?
2. Author Adrian Plass said that the parables of Jesus are 'stories that entertain at the front door while the truth slips in through a side window'. What do you think he meant by this and do you find it a useful definition?
3. How might your small, seemingly insignificant words and actions have a big impact for Jesus?
4. Theologian, George E Ladd, wrote that the biblical evidence about the Kingdom leads to the conclusion that it is both *now and not yet* – it has broken into our world in the history of Israel, the person of Jesus, and the witness of the church, BUT it is not yet fully here and will only be totally realised when Jesus comes again. To what extent do you agree with this conclusion and how does it both challenge and encourage you?
5. It is possible to see two complimentary dynamics of the Kingdom at work in these two parables. First, we see the *centripetal* power of the Kingdom at work in the growth of the mustard tree which attracts birds of the air to come in and nest in its branches. Second, we see the *centrifugal* power of the Kingdom at work in the yeast spreading out from the centre to impact the whole batch of dough. The local church should experience both the centripetal power of the Kingdom as the love and grace of Jesus draws people from the community into the church and the centrifugal power of the Kingdom as the transforming love and grace of Jesus spreads out from the church to impact the community for good.

In what ways do we see these two forces at work currently in our ministry and mission at St James and how could we do better?

Pray:

- Thank God for his Kingdom made manifest in Jesus.
- Pray that God's Kingdom power may flow more forcefully through us as individuals and as a church family.